

The Missile's not Pinned!

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Attention to detail and self-discipline are a couple of important self-imposed actions required while working on the flight line. As a weapons load crew expeditor, it is my job to oversee the weapons maintenance being performed on the flight line. As you read this article, you'll recognize how a lack of attention to detail, a lack of self-discipline and complacency can negatively affect how you accomplish a routine task.

Several years ago, I was preparing for the next day's missions. The flying schedule required that two AIM-7 air-to-air intercept missiles be loaded on each aircraft on the schedule. That night, I tasked my load crews to load AIM-7 missiles on the aft AERO-7 missile launcher stations of our F-4G Wild Weasels. During live loading, an expeditor is always on site in case something goes wrong and he has to call in an emergency. This happened to be one of those nights and I happened to be that expeditor.

The load crew I tasked was experienced and very familiar with each other. All of them knew their load crew position responsibilities, and they also knew what the other crewmembers would be accomplishing at any given time during the load. It was as if they could read each other's minds. However, on this night, the #2 person on this experienced crew was on leave, and his replacement was relatively inexperienced and not familiar with the rest of the crew.

The loading procedure began when the #1 and #3 person on the load crew brought over the first missile on a bomb lift truck. It was positioned and loaded by the #1 person, then locked in by the #2 person. What the #1 person didn't realize was that

the #2 person didn't assist in the positioning of the missile, like his regular #2 person always did. In addition, the new #2 person failed to properly lock the forward missile lug. As a result, the front hook was sitting on top of the lug and pushing down on the missile instead of being properly locked! Luckily the aft hooks had caught the missile. These hooks were the only things holding the missile in place.

To further complicate the situation, the new #2 person failed to install the safety pin in the proper mechanical locking hole. The pin was mistakenly installed into a missile launcher side plate cutout. Unaware of the improperly loaded missile, the load crew proceeded to finish up on the other side of the aircraft.

As they were walking away to start another job, I was performing a post-loading inspection on the air-

craft when I noticed that the forward missile lug wasn't properly locked in. Upon further investigation, I noticed the safety pin was not installed. My heart stopped (at least it seemed that way) as I realized that this missile was as close to falling off the aircraft as it could possibly be. I quickly pinned the missile and immediately called the crew over to reload the missile.

As you can see, attention to detail is vital. This potentially disastrous incident would have been avoided if the #1 load crew chief had ensured the #2 person knew what was expected of him during the load operation. Also, the #1 load crew chief should've had the self-discipline to follow his loading checklist to ensure the missile was properly post loaded.

Finally, complacency set this load crew up for failure because they were too comfortable with each other's loading knowledge and took a loading operation for granted. When the variable of a new load member (#2 person) was thrown into the mix, the load crew didn't adjust their operation as needed to ensure success.

Remember, anytime you feel complacency growing in your work environment, you must fall back on attention to detail and self-discipline to get your operation back on track. Hopefully, this will help you and your fellow workers avoid a possible incident like this. ▶

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